July 5, 1997

Letters to the Editor
The Washington Post
Washington, D.C.

Dear Editor:

The article by George Lardner in the July 3 edition of The Post reports that Gerald R. Ford, while a member of the Warren Commission, suggested that the description of one of President Kennedy's wounds be changed to place it in the back of the neck rather than at the level of the third thoracic vertebra, where the death certificate signed by Admiral George Burkley, the President's personal physician, had placed it and where all the official evidence coming out of the autopsy room the night of the assassination had indicated it to be. The article does not, however, comment on the implications of the fact that Ford made such a suggestion and that it was acted upon: The Warren Commission's purpose was not to search objectively for the truth, but, rather, to make the evidence fit a preconceived "lone assassin" explanation -- even if the evidence had to be fabricated.

Why did the position of the wound have to be changed? Let us review the facts. The Warren Commission acknowledged that there would only have been time for Oswald to get off three shots with the old bolt-action Mannlicher-Carcano rifle he was supposedly using. One bullet hit the President in the head. Another missed and was observed to strike a curb in front of the car. That only left one bullet to strike the President from behind, exit his body, strike and pass through Governor Connally's upper torso, shatter the Governor's wrist and embed itself in his thigh. The Warren Commission therefore came up with the magic bullet theory, a bullet which was supposed to have done just that. The problem was that if as the Warren Commission asserted, the bullet was fired by Oswald from

the sixth floor, it would have entered on a downward trajectory, and if it struck the President at the level of the third thoracic vertebra, some six inches below the wound in the throat, there is no way it could have done a 90 degree turn, exited the throat and struck Connally. Yet, not only the death certificate, but the autopsy diagram prepared by the autopsists themselves and certified by Admiral Burkley, placed it at the level of the third toracic vertebra, not at the base of the neck. The report prepared by the two FBI agents who were in the autopsy room that night also indicated the bullet wound to have been some six inches down in the back. And the bullet holes in the President's clothing are there also, in the back, not in the area of the neck. The Commission simply ignored all that.

And what of the autopsy report prepared that night? What did it say? We will never know. According to the autopsists themselves, they destroyed it, along with all their autopsy notes. We can imagine, however, that if it was consistent with their autopsy diagram, it too placed the wound near the third thoracic vertebra. That, one must assume, is why it had to be destroyed. What then appears in the Warren Commission report was written subsequently, and obviously, as Ford suggested, doctored to fit the magic bullet theory.

Try as they will, supporters of the Warren Commission cannot make the facts fit the theory. According to the official evidence (as opposed to the unsubstantiated and preconceived conclusions of the Warren Commission) , no bullet struck the President in the back of the neck. No bullet exited the throat and struck Connally. Thus, it had to be someone else firing from behind who shot Connally. And if the wound in the throat was not an exit wound, then clearly it was one of entry, which is what the doctors in Dallas said to begin with. In other words, there had to be still a third person firing from in front.

None of this tells us who the gunmen were or the identity of those who gave the orders and were ultimately responsible for the President's death. But it does make it crystal clear that the Warren Commission was not only wrong, it was deliberately so. Which leaves us with the profound and

disturbing question: Why did the Warren Commission so doggedly hide the true facts?

Sincerely,

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I am also a member of the Coalition on Political Assassinations